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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINGSTON 000640

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TAGS: [JM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: A "NEW VISION" FOR THE JLP

REF: A. KINGSTON 00386

[B](#). KINGSTON 00253

Classified By: P/E Geoffrey Siebengartner, Reason 1.4(d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) Emboffs met on February 24 with James Robertson, Deputy Chairman of the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP), and jointly on February 25 with Ken Baugh, Leader of the Opposition, and Karl Samuda, JLP General Secretary. Robertson shared his thoughts on the outgoing leader, Edward Seaga, and the JLP,s plans to close the chapter on the man who led the party for 30 years. Baugh and Samuda laid out the JLP,s vision for the future, and the platform they will take into the upcoming general election.

Robertson on Seaga: The King is Dead

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff, Pol/Econ Chief, and visiting INR analyst met with James Robertson, Deputy Chairman of the JLP, on February [1](#)24. Robertson opened the conversation by reflecting on the previous weekend,s JLP annual conference at the National Arena, during which Bruce Golding was elected to lead the party (septel). Robertson shared his frustration with, and even disdain for, Seaga,s actions surrounding the conference, which he characterized as childish. Robertson offered that Seaga had originally announced that he would boycott the conference when he was deeply offended by its theme: "New Leadership, New Vision." Following that announcement, however, Seaga made a surprise appearance at the event. Robertson was clearly angered by the decision, which he called selfish and dangerous. While he professed concern that the aged leader might have been injured in the standing room-only crowd of thousands of unruly supporters (many of whom appeared intoxicated), it was clear that Robertson's primary objection was to Seaga's showmanship at the event. Robertson added that Seaga,s timing, which had him arrive after Golding, was intended to undermine the newly elected leader,s authority. Robertson continued that Seaga did not want to step aside, but had been forced out by factions within the party. As such, Seaga's appearance at the conference was not entirely unexpected, according to Robertson.

[1](#)3. (C) Robertson, who was a leading member of the reformist pro-Golding faction that pushed for Seaga,s departure, said that he once enjoyed a good relationship with the former leader. However, the two have fallen out due to what Robertson described as his tendency to disagree with Seaga in a very direct manner, which caused confrontations of a sort to which the former leader was not accustomed. Said Robertson, Seaga had come to expect more &respect8 in his dealings with party members. (Note: &Disrespect8 allegedly shown to him by the JLP members has often been the subject of public comments made by Seaga. End Note.)

[1](#)4. (C) On a more respectful note, Robertson admitted that very few leaders would ever achieve the kind of admiration and fierce loyalty that Seaga commanded from his West Kingston constituents in the 43 years during which he represented them as a Member of Parliament. However, although they very much admire him as a father figure, Robertson insisted, Seaga's supporters would almost certainly not vote for him again if Seaga wished to stay on as MP. Robertson made the analogy of a child who reveres but does not obey a parent.

[1](#)5. (C) When asked about the overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception that Seaga received when he entered the arena at the annual conference (Note: cheers for the former leader were much louder than for the new leader, Golding. End Note.), Robertson offered two observations. First, he said that most of the people in the National Arena were the general public, many from Seaga's West Kingston constituency, and not voting delegates. Second, he likened the event to a "Circus Maximus," where spectators cheer the loudest just before the gladiator is killed. Robertson added, "the king is dead, long live the king."

Waging a Campaign without Money

16. (C) Robertson described Golding's candidacy and rise to power as an opportunity created entirely by Golding's supporters. As a result, Golding has used up so much political capital that his supporters now hold him captive.⁸ The next 18 months, Robertson continued, will be Golding's only chance to win an election to lead the JLP. Robertson added that, while he and his team supported Golding's ascent, they are not in Golding's "kitchen cabinet," because the new leader fears them. (Note: Robertson is part of a pro-Golding JLP faction, which includes Senator Horace Chang, commonly referred to as the "Young Turks." End Note.) Robertson explained Prime Minister Patterson's historical record of timing general elections so that opposition candidates would deplete their campaign funding entirely, to be left with an unsustainable campaign in the crucial last leg of the effort. Robertson continued to say that the JLP is currently "broke," and will have a particularly difficult time waging a sustainable campaign against the PNP. As a result, Robertson said, his party is planning a very conservative and grassroots effort to keep Golding in the public view as much as possible over the next 18 months.

The JLP Platform Defined

18. (C) On February 25, Poloff, Pol/Econ Chief, and visiting INR analyst met with Ken Baugh, Opposition Leader, and Karl Samuda, JLP General Secretary. In a discussion of the timing of the upcoming general election, which must be called by the Prime Minister by October 2007, Baugh and Samuda said they would be happy if the People's National Party (PNP) government called an election right now, but ideally they would like six months to prepare Golding and strengthen his position. In coming months, Samuda explained, Golding will present his platform as he tables discussions on structural reform in government, including republicanism, term limits, and fixed election dates. The initiatives, all of which Golding championed when he separated from the JLP to form his own National Democratic Movement (NDM) party in 1995, are designed to wrest some power from the sitting government. Baugh pointed out that the small size of Jamaica's government causes the Westminster system of Parliament not to work very well. It favors the incumbent because the executive is such a large part of the House of Representatives and can easily dominate debates and win votes.

19. (C) Samuda continued by describing the JLP as very much aligned with the U.S. Republican Party, favoring smaller government and business-friendly policy. He asserted that the PNP government has grown from 70,000 to 120,000 employees during its reign. Samuda added that he modeled the party's annual conference after the 2004 U.S. Republican National Convention. In addition to structural reform, Samuda spoke passionately about pro-business policies that would stimulate community-level business as the key to ending poverty and crime. When asked about the promise of Chinese investment in the region (ref A), Samuda replied that there is a lot of opportunity in such a relationship. However, he is not as enthusiastic as many of his countrymen, and believes that it will take some work for Jamaica to benefit from the relationship. He thinks that the real value to Jamaica will be to learn the value of Chinese productivity.

Comment

10. (C) Following a raucous but generally positive annual conference, and with a new leader in place, the JLP seems to be presenting a unified front and exploring a new vision.⁸ In each discussion, our interlocutors contrasted the party's current forward momentum with its backsliding in 2004, caused by internal wranglings that were made public in the news media (ref B). It was clear from our meetings with these top party officials that, despite the obstacle of financing, the JLP is encouraged by its new direction in 2005 and is looking forward to a competitive campaign in the run-up to the general election. On the issue of the Young Turks, some JLP insiders, including Seaga himself, have told us privately that Robertson and Chang are of concern less for their acknowledged political savvy and ruthlessness than for their strongly suspected involvement in illicit activities. This may be part of why Golding wants to keep them at arm's length. End Comment.

ROBINSON